

Lawmakers try to get support for more aeronautics R&D spending

Lawmakers are stepping up efforts to boost federal funding for aeronautics research and development, pushing colleagues to provide \$100 million above the Bush Administration's request for fiscal 2003 and trying to build support for legislation to double aeronautics R&D spending over five years.

All of Virginia's 11 House members recently sent a letter to the leaders of the House Appropriations Committee's VA-HUD-NASA subcommittee urging a \$100 million increase for NASA aeronautics R&D, including \$20 million for high-performance aircraft technology; \$20 million for aeronautical test facility upgrades; \$15 million for rotorcraft research; and \$15 million for supersonic aircraft technology.

The advanced aircraft program, aviation security research and aeronautics university institutes each would get an additional \$10 million.

The Virginia lawmakers, whose state is home to NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, one of four major NASA aeronautics research centers, wrote that the U.S. needs to boost aeronautics R&D spending to keep its edge in civilian and military aviation.

Despite growing aviation competition from Europe and elsewhere, the Bush Administration is proposing to spend \$541 million on NASA's aeronautics program in FY '03, down \$58 million from FY '02 and about half what it was five years earlier.

"Langley is an important national resource, operating more than 30 wind tunnels, numerous laboratories, flight simulators, scientific computing facilities, and research aircraft," the letter says. "These are the tools that have kept the U.S. aeronautics industry dominant in both civil and military aviation, but that dominance has been steadily eroding and our national investment in pushing the aeronautics research envelope is withering."

The letter's signers include Reps. Virgil Goode (I-Va.), James Moran (D-Va.) and Frank Wolf (R-Va.), all members of the House Appropriations Committee.

A similar letter is being drafted in the Senate.

Hill aides lobbied

To build support for legislation that would double aeronautics research and development funding over five years at both the FAA and NASA, several House members June 4 hosted a briefing for congressional aides. Under the bill, spearheaded by Rep. John Larson (D-Conn.), NASA's aeronautics R&D budget would rise

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to \$1.15 billion by 2007, while the FAA's aeronautics R&D funding would go up to \$550 million by the same year (DAILY, May 6).

Roy Harris, chief technical adviser for the NASA Aeronautics Support Team (NAST), said at the briefing that the Larson bill is needed to sustain American military air superiority, head off a continued decline in the U.S. share of the world's civil aircraft market, and curb airport congestion.

"Failure to act now will result in continued erosion of U.S. aviation leadership, unrealized national economic growth, and increasingly constrained mobility for all Americans," Harris said.

The bill has 23 co-sponsors and has been referred to the House Science space subcommittee. Larson is a member of that subcommittee and could offer his legislation as an amendment to the panel's NASA reauthorization bill later this year.

Supporters of the Larson bill believe similar legislation soon will be introduced in the Senate.

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